

The Rhetorical Efficacy of John Milton's "Areopagitica"

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In all the pages and pages of criticism that have been written concerning John Milton's *Areopagitica* (and the literary tomes certainly have accumulated over the centuries as a brief visit to any library will attest), there exists one undeniable and striking deficiency: a marked paucity of analysis concerning the work's effectiveness. Perhaps it has been taken for granted that the pamphlet-speech is the work of a master; perhaps to stoop to examine it would pass for a sign of intellectual *faiblesse*, a demonstration of complete idiocy—for who does not recognize the greatness of Milton?—or, contrary, to dare to question his greatness would be an act of unforgivable pomposity, the ultimate *faux pas*. Or maybe the practical failure of the work is simply well-known: emancipation of the press wasn't achieved until 1695 (Jebb xxix). In any case, whether from faith, pride, humility, or pragmatism, literary critics have not taken up the subject. Rather than talking about Milton's audience and whether it ever "bought" his spiel, critics seem happier talking about Milton and the spiel itself.

Such a relative absence in the literature seems surprising. After all, questions about the work's success—the work's at least philosophic acquisition of its goals—seem to this author the most compelling questions. How did readers respond to *Areopagitica*? How did members of Parliament in particular respond? Did the argumentation, so ostensibly cogent, impress? repulse? draw in? push away? And a deeply related question: did the argument—not the argumentation, but the argument itself—persuade? (For truth is a decided strength in any rhetoric.) Did readers assent to Milton's argument's political, historical, religious, and ultimately ontological validity? Or did they regard it as empty sophism? To respond to such interrogatives, it is necessary first to know the innards of Milton's work: how he propounded, and what exactly he was propounding. It seems a more natural flow of thought to begin with the latter.

Milton's basic argument is an expostulation for freedom of print. Freedom of print should not be confused with the modern idea of freedom of the press. Rather, freedom of print refers to the right of an author to publish as he wishes. This right does not insure that published materials will not at some point be censored; but it does insure that what is published will *first* be published and *then* censored. Ideas will at least have the right of public birth. As Milton vividly summarizes, "no envious Juno [will sit] cross-legged over the nativity of any man's intellectual offspring; but if it [proves] a monster, who denies, but that it [will be] justly burnt, or sunk into the sea?" (Milton 567).

It might prove beneficial at this point, in order to understand what Milton champions, to understand also why he champions it, why it is even needful of a champion. The history of print in England is not a history of publishers deeming autonomously and independently the appropriateness of works for print; though their activity did go more or less unregulated from the introduction of printing to England in 1471 until 1557 (it was affected only from time to time by royal proclamation), these *laissez faire* conditions were not immutable. In 1557 the trade was centralized and brought under government control with the establishment of the Stationer's Company. A franchise of 97 London stationers, the Stationer's Company comprised the only publishing houses granted the royal privilege of printing (Jebb xxiii). When Elizabeth I

ascended the throne a year later, she retained this system, only shuffling the franchisees to suit her Protestantism as opposed to the Catholicism of her predecessor (Jebb xxiv). She did add further measures, though, in 1559 with the 51st Injunction Concerning Religion; it mandated that no book, excepting schoolbooks or certain classics, be printed without a license from one of the following entities: 1) the Queen; 2) Six Members of the Privy Council; 3) the Chancellor of the University of Oxford; 4) the Chancellor of the University of Cambridge; 5) the Archbishop of Canterbury; 6) the Archbishop of York; 7) the Bishop of London; or 8) the Bishop and the Archdeacon of the place of publication. These general rules held for some time, with only a slight alteration in 1586 that added two licensed presses, one at each the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and reduced the licensors to Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London (Jebb xxiv).

James I and Charles I were satisfied to continue governing through this framework. By 1637, though, whether from lax enforcement or from evasion of the law, it appears that the Crown had lost some of its control over the presses (Jebb xxv-xxvi). In an attempt to regain control, the Star Chamber published a decree that restricted licensors to four persons only (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, and the Chancellors of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge), slashed the number of franchised stationners to twenty-three and the number of franchised type-founders to four, and reduced the number of presses a printing house might legally keep. Additionally, the decree granted sweeping enforcement powers (Jebb xxvi-xxvii).

When in 1641 the Star Chamber was abolished, Parliament continued to exercise similarly rigorous powers of censorship by founding a twenty-person board of licensors known as the Committee of Examinations (Jebb xxvii). It may at first seem strange that a body of reformers whom Milton praises as “good men and worthy magistrates,” offering “faithful guidance” and possessing “undaunted wisdom” and “indefatigable virtues” (Milton 562) would act in a manner so contrary to Milton’s preference; one might think that the ideals of Parliament and the man who praises Parliament would naturally parallel. Upon closer examination, however, the mystery of Parliament’s divergence from its ideals in the matter of licensing quickly evaporates. Presbyterian members of Parliament (the majority of both houses, outnumbering their Independent allies), though outspoken devotees to liberty of the press while themselves oppressed, ceased in their devotions to this liberty once in power. Whereas previously print had helped their cause, now it detracted (Jebb xxvii). Parliament’s choice to sacrifice ideals in an attempt to silence their more radically Protestant brothers the Independents demonstrated all too clearly the *modus operandi* they would employ two years later in 1643. In that year the Parliament produced and passed what has become known as the Order of Licensing. An order of both the Lords and Commons, it prohibited the publication or importation of any work that had not first been licensed (Jebb xxviii). John Milton wrote his *Areopagitica* in response to this piece of legislation (Jebb xxix).

Of course Milton’s disenchantment over licensed printing could not stand in and of itself merely *because* it was a well-established, precedented disenchantment; it necessarily required ideological support. Accordingly, Milton backs his main premise (that unlicensed printing should be legal) with strong corollaries. These substantiating arguments are largely religious and historical in nature. Whether his audience affirmed the truth of these corollaries would certainly have determined whether they were persuaded by them. To understand readers’ reactions to *Areopagitica*, then, it is necessary to examine the arguments in tandem with the religious feeling of the time and the 17th century-Englishman’s conception of history.

Milton's strongest religious argument in *Areopagitica* concerns the natures of sin and virtue. He states clearly his position: that knowledge of sin (i.e., knowledge of evil) should not be confused with sin itself. This religious proposition ties in to his argument for unlicensed printing in its application: that reading a book which describes or contains evil does not make the reader himself evil by its merely informing him of vice's existence, nature, and manifestations; it does not, in keeping with Milton's diction, pose the risk of "infection" to the reader's personal virtue (Milton 570). Furthermore, Milton goes so far as to say that personal virtue *demand*s a knowledge of sin:

He that can apprehend and consider vice...and yet abstain...and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian...The virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness. (Milton 569)

He adds that "the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth" (Milton 570).

So if Milton claims sin *is not* the knowledge of evil, what would he say sin *is*? *Areopagitica* offers a clear, albeit indirect, definition when its author states, "Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary" (Milton 569). Ineluctably present in the statement is the Late Augustinian view of sin (Grace 4). According to this view, sin is not an accident that happens because man acts in sinful ways; rather, man acts in sinful ways *because* he is sinful. In other words, humans are from the moment of conception—that is, by very nature—corrupt. One might even argue, a man is no longer a man: Adam's disobedience altered the very essence of man, changing him into another sort of creature altogether. As William Grace has explained, "We know that a man might lose his leg in an accident and sire a child who had two perfectly good legs. But if a man had only one leg because of a mutation, he would sire a child with only one leg. The question is whether original sin is like the accidental loss of the leg or is it like a mutation? The Late Augustinians looked upon original sin in terms of a mutation." (4)

One can see clearly, then, that Late Augustinians like Milton viewed sin as a deep-reaching, soul-scraping phenomenon, one not so trifling as to be affected by superficial activities like reading.

To adopt this framework of sin-identification was probably a wise move on Milton's part, for it was to advocate his reader's likely theological position. The ideas of Late Augustinianism had been incorporated into Lutheranism in the seventeenth century and had been even further developed by Calvinists (Grace 4). By 1643 members of Parliament were nearly all radical Protestants, and certainly all Calvinists. They would have been intimately familiar with the doctrine and doubtless convinced of its veracity.

Another wise move of Milton's in the speech is his approach toward reason. Indeed, the theme is prevalent in the author's religious arguments: words like "discretion," "judicious," "leading capacity," and "temperance" abound most in the section that contains Scripture. Yet despite a centrality of the topic 'reason' to the argument for unlicensed printing—a centrality that might suggest the need for a definition of reason—the speech manages to eschew any sort of divisive specificity. Milton scoops up the classic, humanist attitude toward reason and carries its adherents along while also deftly avoiding the exclusion of even his most radically Calvinist readers. In other words, he leaves his use of the concept "reason" vague enough to satisfy both

parties. Milton's deviously cunning rhetoric emerges in the central pronouncement that, "God...trusts [man] with the gift of reason to be his own chooser; there were but little work left for preaching, if law and compulsion should grow so fast upon those things which heretofore were governed only by exhortation" (Milton 569). That is to say, God leaves it up to man to decide what he will read: what will be beneficial to him, and what will be a snare. The brilliance of this pronouncement lies in its placement. Sandwiched between biblical exegeses on either side, radical Calvinists are subtly guided into taking this unnamed, unspecified man to be a man like themselves: a regenerate man. This assumption preempts any problems true, five-point Calvinists might have with placing confidence in the reason of an unsaved person. Such problems otherwise would stem from Milton's mention of reason. Committed Calvinists of the seventeenth century believed in the total depravity of man, his inability to do anything virtuous aside from the power of God at work within him. They viewed good works (including good decisions about what or what not to read) as an "expression of grace" in a believer's life (Grace 4); remove the Holy Spirit, and this "man" Milton speaks of is rendered helpless to choose well. Thus couching his introduction of conscience in the language of Christian thought proves a calculated move, embracing extreme Calvinism while not rejecting humanists. (They would remain free to view the man in question as believer or non-believer, both capable of acting and choosing virtuously.)

With so many strong rhetorical points in his favor thus far on the religious side of his argument, are there any detractors which might have harmed his argument? A few can be named. First and foremost there the way in which Milton uses Scripture. Although his speech is chocked full of direct quotation (a definite plus when dealing with an audience of radical Protestants whose primary focus of worship is God's Word), his selection of verses and his commentary on them (his explanation of how the Scripture ties in) prove less faultless. First of all, several of the verses he chooses are famously difficult to interpret. The prime example is found in Titus 1:15, "To the pure, all things are pure" (Milton 568). There is no *one* interpretation among theologians as to this verse, even up to the present day. Second, Milton withdraws many of the verses or biblical allusions that he uses from their most immediate context and their most immediate meaning and to invest them instead with another, more distant meaning. While the practice of attributing above one meaning to a verse is not wholly uncommon, generally a more conservative hermeneutics than Milton employs guides interpretation. The paradigm of Milton's interpretive liberalism comes in his discussion of Acts 10:13, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (Milton 568), the words of God to his apostle in a vision. Scripture interprets this verse little more than twenty verses later when in Acts 10:34-35 Peter explains that the vision signifies the extension of the Gospel and the Covenant to Gentiles. Though one might interpret this verse in other more general ways (for instance, as a rescinding of certain Old Testament laws, as a reminder that no one shall be justified by the Law, as a general call to exercise love for one's neighbor, or as a spur for evangelism), Milton's way is certainly unorthodox: he claims that the verse grants man a greater authority for deciding issues of personal freedom. The unorthodoxy continues with his bringing Exodus's account of God's provision of manna in the wilderness into the argument...somehow.

Likely the Presbyterians to whom Milton would have been addressing *Areopagitica* would have been skeptical of and uncomfortable with this use of Scripture. Such should come as no surprise since these same Presbyterians comprise a group of literalists (people who interpret the Bible literally according to a strict hermeneutics) whom Milton elsewhere criticized. Stanley Fish has observed that,

The center of [Milton's] theology is the doctrine of the inner light, and his entire career can be viewed as an exercise in vigilance in which he repeatedly detects in this or that political or social or ecclesiastical program one more attempt to substitute for the authority of the inner light the false authority of some external or imposed rule. In practical and operational terms, this means that he rejects the claim of any prefabricated or ready-made formulation to contain or identify what is true and valuable, and insists on referring all questions of truth and value to the standard written by the spirit of God in the fleshly tables of the regenerate heart. (191-92)

In some cases, as his *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* shows, Milton took the view so far as to elevate this "inner light" over Scriptural canon: "the form of the danger is no less than the Bible itself" (Fish 192). Considering that the *Divorce* was published the same year as the Order of Licensing and contained notably controversial material, Parliamentarians would have been familiar with Milton's questionable brand of interpretation, and this widely-known divergence of belief, in turn, might well have negatively affected their reception of *Areopagitica*.

Questions of hermeneutics would not have been the only source of disparity for Presbyterian readers, however. Another cause for friction can be found in Milton's treatment of the nature of good and evil. In this domain the writer suggests that either meaning of the two words can be grasped only through conceptualization of the meaning of the other; that is to say, good can only be understood by evil, and evil by good. One is what the other is not. Milton famously adapts Jesus's parable of the wheat and the tares when he alludes,

Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixed. (Milton 569)

Milton also calls the two "twins cleaving together" and theorizes that, "perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil" (Milton 569). Semantically this manner of understanding good proves for some, immensely alarming. To declare that 'good' is interpreted only as "whatever evil is not" is to define the idea as merely an absence of the opposite quality, which is, in turn, to suggest that good is not an object of reference, that it doesn't even have a nature, and that it is an empty construct of context rather than an objective reality. Puritans would not have jived with this conception, or at least certainly not with its implications. The readers of Milton's tract were of a conservative, legalistic strain, a tradition where the world comes largely in two colors: black and white. While Puritans may not have been dogmatists, they were not accustomed to placing things like good and evil—especially things as *important* as good and evil—into the category of "grey area" (a category that would likely have been comparatively small for possessors of their worldview). Consequently, though Milton frames good and evil in perfect position to support brilliantly his argument for licensing prohibition, this framework indirectly creates ramifications which would have raised at least subconscious red flags for the majority of his audience.

Yet whether well- or ill-received on the whole, Milton's religious arguments were not the only supporting materials the author offered his readers; he also drew heavily upon a historical arsenal. Probably this formulation more than any other composes the strength of *Areopagitica*, though to modern readers it may appear the most soporific weakness. In the sixteenth century, however, conception and value of the ancient world was very much a part of intellectual life. In

the grammar schools which nearly all educated people attended, the format varied little: a typical curricula included Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and Latin, Greek *only* for eight years. At St. Paul's School where Milton attended, for instance, the four-year lower school focused on Latin grammar, simpler Latin authors, Latin conversation, and exercises in Latin. The four-year upper school thankfully added a bit more diversification, but the emphasis was still more than overwhelmingly on the classics: Greek grammar, Latin poetry and oratory, and some Hebrew (Clark 109). Consider the standard eight years of study a seventeenth-century Englishman received as his earliest education during his formative years, and it is both inconceivable that he would escape a knowledge of the ancient world as well as perfectly understandable that he would acquire a fierce humanist bent. Milton appealed to these systems when he incorporated a history of censorship into his speech.

Yet there is another historical element which he calls upon, one whose roots stretch even deeper into the English psyche: a tradition of martyrology which is, in turn, connected to a well-accepted apocalyptic perspective on the Church's past. This use of history both helps and harms Milton's argument; its rhetorical value is ambivalent at best and, as Genelle Girtz-Robinson cogently argues, counterproductive at worst.

Throughout *Areopagitica* the reader will find abundant reference to torture, trial, and martyrdom. One need not even look far; Milton quickly establishes a groundwork when he lends a physical form to the subject he claims has become the victim of persecution: the opening lines of the speech introduce a trope by which the writer represents books as embodied entities: "For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them" (Rudrum 563). And again, famously, "a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life" (Milton 563). Having established a substantial entity that may be the recipient of torture and trial, he proceeds a short time later to execute said mention of torture. He warns that, "We should be wary therefore what persecutions we raise [by licensing],...how we spill that seasoned life of man, preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom" (Milton 564). He later complains that licensing "[rakes] through the entrails of many an old good author, with a violation worse than any could be offered to his tomb" (Milton 566). In this place, Girtz-Robinson points out, "this vivid picture of disembowelment subordinates the author's actual body (represented by the buried corpse) to that of his text, assigning the text a greater physicality" (966).

The incarnation of books and the subsequently gruesome scenes Milton paints of torture, as well as his references to the Inquisition, would almost certainly have called to mind the scenes which John Bale and his protégé John Foxe catalogued in their descriptions of English martyrs' deaths, for as early as 1571, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* was on display in every cathedral church, and many parishes had acquired their own copy; the multivolumed ecclesiastical work had already gained near-biblical regard (Girtz-Robinson 972). This association of licensing with Bale's and Foxe's *corpus* of work would also have brought with it a connected association between the signification of licensing and the signification of the martyrdom of their saints. The exact significance of this latter martyrdom is, according to the two church historians, that periods of Christian suffering always prefigure periods of great reformation.

Indeed Bale and Foxe had both addressed church history in this fashion, stringing together various Christian sects of various time and place by their common suffering. This agglomeration of distinct and separate instances of persecution is their response to censorious

Catholics who derisively asked, “If the true church was indeed the Protestant church..., then where did it exist before Martin Luther?” It was their attempt to legitimize the Protestant church by giving it a heritage and an inclusion in the apostolic succession (Girtz-Robinson 968).

In his *The Image of Bothe Churches* (1545), Bale builds up this formulation of suffering as history into epic proportions. He reads the biblical prophecy of the seven seals of Revelation as a description of the ages of the church, particularly the English church, and of its relative periods of acceptance or persecution. As Girtz-Robinson explains,

Bale established an exegetical tradition in England that interpreted the apocalypse not as a timetable for the future, but as a key to the past. It was a method of exegesis that privileged historical inquiry, that trained its reader to look backwards in order to discern the progress of reform. (969)

Foxe incorporates a similarly apocalyptic interpretation into his history. Both accounts include the esoteric millennium of Revelation as an era of the past, suggesting that the zenith of reform had already been attained; persecution had brought forth its perfect result, a reformed church, and the summit of the church’s sanctification (insofar as it is possible this side of heaven) had been attained. However, by the mid-1600s Englishmen began to wonder if perhaps the climax of reform had not been attained; perhaps it was yet to come. They had every reason to wonder. Domestic instability was attaining fever-pitch. Persecution of dissenters had, for one thing, been revived: radical Protestant authors like Prynne, Bastwick, and Burton, the “triumvirate of putative martyrs” according to Paul Christianson, had not so long ago had their ears trimmed, their noses slit, and their cheeks branded for their published works (Girtz-Robinson 973-74). Additionally, reforms of the Long Parliament were in full swing. The chaos and persecution which had so marked past eras of rapid church growth were both imminently present, and popular feeling was that something great must be approaching.

Milton too displays such a sense of impending exaltation. He exhibits belief in a “providential, even nationalistic plan” when he declares, “God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, ev’n to the reforming of Reformation it self: what does he then but reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men?” (Girtz-Robinson 966). He does the same when he “rallies for ‘such a deliverance as shall never be forgott’n by any revolution of time’” (Girtz-Robinson 966). Such surprisingly, anachronistically chauvinistic rhetoric (it sounds like the imperialist egotism of the nineteenth century) supports the notion that Milton is indeed incorporating English martyrology and its outgrowth, apocalypticism, in their entirety of thought. To do so would have had mixed consequences on readership.

It must be admitted that the inclusion of a highly valued system of understanding English history, and in particular English ecclesiastical history, would certainly have put Milton on the same playing field as his radically Protestant audience. He must be lauded for this rhetorically sound decision. Yet it seems that invariably a detractor will always spring up to any imaginable choice, and the case is no different here. Girtz-Robinson writes,

Milton’s revelation of Parliament’s ties to the Inquisition...unravels his argument about the ill effects of censorship. This is chiefly because his equation of licensing with inquisitorial practice itself draws upon a powerful tradition of English martyrology that positively values torture and trial. (964)

In other words, in some twisted, masochist sense, the English psyche answers to oppression. To try to encourage the straightforward extirpation of it (by claiming that prior licensing is oppressive), then, Girtz-Robinson argues, would prove counterproductive. This claim may have

some merit, but it is this author's opinion that any merit it does possess is mitigated to a large degree by the historical picture one gains of the Parliamentarians. These were men who deeply valued liberty and who killed their king in order to *throw off* oppression. While there may have been some lurking positive cultural valuation of suffering, it is safe to say that few, and especially not public men involved in a rebellion, would have asked to be oppressed simply out of the persuasion that oppression causes knowledge (in the form of books) to flourish. One may feel reasonably secure, then, in saying that Milton's rhetorical use of history is even more effective than his use of religious argument.

But speaking of rhetoric, it is necessary to point out that logic and truth of argument is only one facet of good argumentation; style is also integral. Accordingly, this is the area where Milton shines most brightly. He uses (in keeping with safe English humanism) the form of a classic oration, a form that would have been expected, perfectly understood, and well-received (Clark 9). The reader knows that this form of the speech is an intentional decision of Milton's since its highly-structured, quadripartite nature is artificial to the "orator" and not the natural style he exudes elsewhere (Kendrick 657). His *dispositio*, or arrangement of arguments, is completely conventional. It consists of the standard *exordium*, or attention-getter and rapport-builder; *narratio*, or "statement of facts colored to make them appear favorable to the speaker's side" (Clark 10); *divisio*, or forecast of the main premises; *confirmatio*, or "affirmative proof" (Clark 11); *refutatio*, or defense; and peroration, or an invigorating closing (Clark 10-11).

One might at first think the speech not that rhetorically valuable and actually rather boring; however, upon closer inspection, one should find that it is brilliant. For the seventeenth-century mind, at least, this speech is custom-built. Milton's exordium displays ingenuity and finesse. He manages to set up excellent relations with his audience by easing slowly into his topic, first convincing his readers the Parliamentarians that he is indeed on their side. He humbles himself by suggesting that he has "doubt of what will be the success" and "fear of what will be the censure," yet he also maintains a hope and a confidence (Milton 561). He then identifies a common goal shared by him and his audience: the welfare of the nation. Next, he praises Parliament for the liberal-minded reforms they've enacted as well as for their personal virtue. He skillfully rebuts the accusation of flattery he may otherwise have been working himself into; this mention of the concern with flattery exhibits Milton's familiarity with current seventeenth-century trends of thought and renders him up-to-date and interesting. Finally, the writer reiterates his friendship toward Parliament and cautiously but steadily begins his plea.

The rest of the speech continues with such artistic prowess. After his long catalogue of the history of censorship (interspersed as it was with what this author's speech teacher referred to as "sparkle," or comments made to reinvigorate a rhetorical work with liveliness), Milton regains his audience's attention with a pithy interlude where he comically insults the *Imprimatur* and even indirectly mentions an insane Roman emperor and his obsession with flatulence (Milton 566-67). All these mentions revivify the audience to launch into the second of Milton's arguments, the religious ones. Finally, at the end of the speech, Milton concludes with a rousing rhetorical crescendo that, though it doesn't exactly summarize his main points, definitely carries the reader along by force of momentum. All these stylistic elements unite to validate the claim that of all Milton's rhetorical strategies, his use of the language is by far the most effective.

Thus with all things having been laid plain, a few conclusions may be ventured: first of all, that Milton uses rhetoric more effectively than he uses logic; second, that he uses logic in a mighty way; and third, that this mighty way is not always to his advantage. Sometimes the strength of Milton's arguments carry him away from his goal by throwing up walls of religious

and ontological disagreement. Among the most notably divisive instances are his unorthodox use and interpretation of Scripture and his take on the nature of good and evil. It should not be neglected, however, that Milton does get several things right in his exercise of religious argument, including his Late Augustinian view of original sin and his ambiguous treatment of reason. All things considered, the outcome of the situation *Areopagitica* addresses seems about right. Though it likely succeeded in offering much food for thought and a strong feeling of philosophical veracity (the sense that “there’s something to this argument”), it did not succeed in persuading Parliamentarians to repeal their Order. It is doubtful any supplication, even of the highest order, would have been sufficient to bate the hold such men in power held; in the political sphere as in many others, what is necessary often trumps what is right. Yet *Areopagitica* should not be dismissed. As an impressive work of philosophy, it laid the foundations for thought that would come after and express itself in such authors as John Locke and John Stuart Mill (Kendall 439). And eventually, in 1695, prior licensing would be abolished: Milton would win his day.

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